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The revenge of Gaia and the hope of utopia in the Mediterranean Sea’s decline

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“*Nobody can protect humanity against madness or suicide*” (Cornelius Castoriadis)¹

The current generations are the first to experience the emergence of the spectre of insurmountable limits. The revenge of the goddess *Gaia*, publicized by the great British scientist James Lovelock as the symbol to depict the earth, is surging throughout the whole planet².

It reveals itself in the form of disasters: climate change, nuclear contamination, new pandemics, the end of oil at low prices, the exhaustion of renewable and non-renewable natural resources, the deleterious effects of synthetic products, the counter-productivity of our technical systems, social crises and the blatant failure of modernity’s promise of happiness, fundamentalist and terrorist threats, nationalist uprisings, etc. The Mediterranean region is not immune to these factors. Its fragile ecosystem constitutes an important organ of *Gaia*, and it reveals all the wounds which have been inflicted upon it. Today, we are living in a society of globalised market of growth. This type of globalised society is built upon three principles of infinite growth for its own sake and does away with limits in production, and consequently in the depletion of renewable and non-renewable resources, with limits in consumption and thus in the creation of artificial needs and superfluous products, and lastly with limits in the production of waste, therefore resulting in the pollution of air, water and land. Our economic overgrowth collides with the limits and finiteness of the planet, which by and large already goes beyond the ability of the biosphere’s regeneration.

Unfortunately, the Mediterranean region is an ideal ecological model. Its ecological footprint vastly exceeds a sustainable one. The “*mare nostrum*” is dangerously close to becoming a dead sea, paved with migrant corpses drowned at sea and surrounded by deserts³. The last remaining forests, with their residual biodiversity, are doomed

¹ Domaines de l’homme, Les carrefours du Labyrinthe 2, Seuil, 1986, p. 371

² James Lovelock, The Revenge of Gaia. Earth’s Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity, Allen Lane, London, 2006
 Trad. Française : La Revanche de Gaïa. Pourquoi la terre riposte-t-elle ? Flammarion, 2007

³ see Sir Martin Rees, *Notre dernier siècle?* (Our Final Century), J.C. Lattes, 2004

to disappear together with the societies that surround them. In order to prevent this foreboding destiny and calm down the goddess's rage, it is necessary to break away from the current trend towards productivity and consumption, and to start an uncertain *métanoia* ('reconversion'). We need to take the path leading towards a revolution of degrowth, which does not involve a mythical 'alternative development', or an equally mythical growth (also known as green). Not even the craziest technological innovations would make such a thing possible.

The transition towards a utopian society of modest abundance, of degrowth and the road to post-development, can find favourable conditions even in the Mediterranean region, favouring the construction of a sustainable society built on moderation and solidarity.

What chances do we have of achieving such a future and preventing an apocalypse? The probabilities are very few! This is not due to the lack of scientific knowledge about this threat, but because the short-term interests at stake are very important and because the colonisation of our contemporaries' imagination is too strong. It will be difficult to contrast the lobbying powers in due time.

However, it is useful to reflect on the issue and take concrete steps for a sustainable future, whose realisation might eventually take place after the collapse, if we do not totally succeed in harnessing *Gaia*'s rage.